

# Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) Conference 2006

Achieving Success—Commitment into Action

S A P R O

Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Office



## Male Victims: Special Issues Workshop



# Overview

1. Quick review: Special issues for male sexual assault victims
2. Checking in: Ring true? What's missing?
3. Discussions by topic: Comparing your experiences, challenges, and successes



# **Implications for Males Sexually Assaulted in Military**

- From birth, highly vulnerable to yet unprepared for emotional effects of sexual assault
- Conditioned to be less aware, less expressive, and less empathic toward vulnerable emotions
- Conditioned to embrace male role and values
- Enlisted partly to deal with masculinity, vulnerability
- Boot camp and service reinforced male conditioning
- Many “masculine needs” may have been met by military, but key capacities for dealing with sexual assault were not cultivated, even suppressed



# Implications for Males Sexually Assaulted in Military

Men sexually assaulted in military will likely...

- Be unprepared to deal with the vulnerable emotions
- Resist seeking help, and be ineffective at doing so
- Believe their hard-earned, soldier-based manhood has been “shattered,” “robbed,” “destroyed”



# Implications for Males Sexually Assaulted in Military

Men sexually assaulted in military will likely...

- Feel betrayed by military – the institution and people they counted on to support their successful manhood
- Feel isolated and alienated from peers, subordinates and superiors
- Have resurgence of pre-military insecurities related to masculinity, emotional vulnerability – and for many, victimization in childhood



# Implications for Males Sexually Assaulted in Military

Values and qualities military instills can promote recovery too

- Courage to face what happened
- Strength to address vulnerabilities
- Commitment to overcome conditioning
- Discipline to see through recovery
- Loyalty to self, fellow soldiers, country





# **Education, Training and Advocacy Responsibilities**

- Have you attempted to educate others, including in very small ways, about male victims issues?
  - Volunteer Advocates
  - ITP team
  - Commanding officers
- Are you considering doing so?
- What resources would you need to do this?



# **Education, Training and Advocacy Responsibilities**

- Have you attempted to educate others – again, could be in very small ways – about potential biases in their responses to male victims?
  - Beliefs about men as victims
  - Beliefs about how men should seek help
  - Beliefs about how men should cope and recover
  - Responses to complex or “difficult” victims
- Are you considering doing so?
- What resources would you need to do this?





# **Victim Advocacy Responsibilities**

In which areas do you feel most competent? Most in need of training?

- Seeing uniqueness of each man
- Empathic listening
- Recognizing your conditioned biases
- Assessing past trauma, current symptoms and risk factors
- Offering options and supporting men to make their choices



# **Seeing Uniqueness of Each Man**

- Have you found yourselves over-generalizing from limited experiences with male victims?
- If so, what could help you avoid this trap?
- Examples of men who confounded expectations you formed based on work with another male victim?
- What about stereotyping gay or bisexual men?



# **Empathic Listening**

- It is extremely difficult and courageous for a male victim to...
  - Disclose to you that he was assaulted
  - Reveal his vulnerability, fear, pain, and posttraumatic symptoms
  - Risk being misunderstood, judged, blamed, shamed, humiliated
- What gets in the way of remembering and appreciating this at the time?
- What has helped?



# Empathic Listening

- Stories of how listening with genuine connection and respect – even when you “didn’t know what to say” – clearly had a large and positive impact?
- Examples of men for whom it was not empathic to focus on feelings? What did it mean to be empathic to them?



# Empathic Listening

- What have you found to be the underlying...
  - Feelings driving confusing or unhealthy behaviors?
  - Fears about seeking help, investigation process?
  - Beliefs about assault's meaning, career implications?
- How has listening for these enabled you to be more effective in your roles?
- How can you help yourself to listen more carefully for these underlying issues?



# **Empathic Listening**

- What mixed feelings and motivations have you listened to men wrestling with?
  - About seeking help and treatment
  - About revealing feelings, fears, symptoms, beliefs
  - About making formal non-confidential report
- How have you helped men sort through these feelings and motivations?
- Are you interested in specific training to improve your ability to help victims resolve mixed feelings and make wise choices?





# Empathic Listening

What about the distinction between advocating for a male victim vs. taking sides in his internal struggles?

- Is this clear to you?
- Can you think of male victims who became more resolved not to do something you suggested, even as you provide more persuasive reasons?
- Are there particular areas where you've found it's easy to fall into this trap?



# **Recognizing Your Conditioned Biases**

- Have you found yourself believing myths that we've all have been conditioned to believe?
  - Males can't be victims of sexual assault
  - Weak and unmanly if assaulted, or need help
  - Must be gay or have given off "homosexual signals"
- Have you noticed that such myths are most compelling when you feel overwhelmed, at a loss for how to help, or otherwise threatened?
- How have you questioned and countered these ideas and the impact they can have on your ability to be empathic and helpful?
- What can help you avoid such "myth traps"?



# Recognizing Your Conditioned Biases

- What personal biases can affect your work with male victims?
- Who or what “pushes your buttons”?
  - Angry men?
  - Men who cry?
  - Depressed men?
  - Gay or bisexual men?
  - Men who try to cope with alcohol or drugs?
  - Men who say it’s happened to them before?
- What can help you recognize and counter such biases?



# **Recognizing Your Conditioned Biases**

- What judging thoughts arise as you listen?
- When your efforts to help are rejected, criticized, or seem useless, do you think:
  - “How could he have let this happen?”
  - “No wonder he got raped.”
  - “He’s pathetic and weak.”
  - “Why can’t he just decide what to do?”
- How can you ensure that such inevitable thoughts don’t derail your work?



# **Assessing Past Trauma, Current Symptoms and Risk Factors**

- Have you found safe ways to ask about prior abuse or assault, and chronic trauma?
  - Sexual or physical abuse, neglect, bullying
  - Betrayal by family members or authorities – as perpetrators or negligent bystanders
- How have men responded to these inquiries?
- How have you used this information to help them understand current reactions and options for getting appropriate help now?



# **Assessing Past Trauma, Current Symptoms and Risk Factors**

- Have you found safe ways to assess the following?
  - Depression
  - Suicidal thoughts, intentions, plans
  - Substance abuse
  - Sleep problems
  - Sexual problems
  - Anger, hostility, risk of violence
- Are some of the problems above more difficult for men to admit and talk about?
- Do you need more training in this area?





# **Assessing Past Trauma, Current Symptoms and Risk Factors**

- Have you been alert to signs of complex trauma?
  - Acting like it didn't happen
  - Not protecting self from further harm
  - Significant memory problems, inconsistent reports
  - Major problems in work relationships
  - Deliberate self-destructive behaviors
- Have you seen different versions of these in men?
- Examples of spotting complex trauma “red flags” early and this improving your advocacy efforts?
- Are these areas where you need more training?



# **Assessing Past Trauma, Current Symptoms and Risk Factors**

- Have you been looking for the motives and causes behind complex trauma behaviors?
  - Attempts at control
  - Inability to manage intense emotions and arousal
  - Dissociation
  - Extreme distrust
  - Reenactment of abuse dynamics
- Is it harder to see these underlying causes in men?
- Have reactions to men's complex trauma behaviors prevented you from seeing what's behind them?
- What can help you see underlying motives and causes?



# **Offering Options and Supporting Men to Make Choices**

- What assumptions do you have about how the assault response or recovery process “must” or “should” be for male victims?
- Do you keep in mind what different men will need to recover, or be capable of doing to recover, both short- and long-term?
  - Simple or complex trauma
  - Supportive partner, CO, friends, family
  - Treatment and other resources available now vs. later



# **Offering Options and Supporting Men to Make Choices**

- Have men you've worked with contradicted your assumptions about the recovery process?
- Have you been flexible enough to revise your "recovery road maps"?
- Which assumptions of yours seem most deeply ingrained?



# **Offering Options and Supporting Men to Make Choices**

Treatment options: Individual vs. group

- Have you been able to help men sort through treatment options and their preconceptions about them?
  - Individual therapy?
  - Group therapy?
- What approaches, concepts, metaphors, etc. have been most helpful with this?



# **Offering Options and Supporting Men to Make Choices**

## **Treatment Options to Investigate**

- Have you found good off-base treatment options, especially for men with sexual orientation issues?
- Have you found therapists, especially male therapists, with experience treating male abuse and assault victims?
- Have you found therapists who can creatively leverage masculine and military conditioning and values?





# **Offering Options and Supporting Men to Make Choices**

## **Treatment Options to Investigate**

- What about gathering information to “match” male victims with appropriate therapists – in terms of style, experience, etc.?
- Are you aware of EMDR as a treatment option?
  - Potential very rapid relief for men who without child abuse histories
  - Potential perfect fit for men unwilling to talk about “shameful” assault experiences, feelings, or meanings in treatment



## **Selected Resources**

- Men's experiences of sexual abuse and assault  
Lisak, D. (1994). The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 525-548. [www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Lisak1994.pdf](http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/Lisak1994.pdf)
- Motivational Interviewing: Great approach to dealing with victims' ambivalence, and helping them to make wise choices about responding to the assault and its effects  
[www.motivationalinterview.org/clinical/](http://www.motivationalinterview.org/clinical/)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR): Effective therapy for transforming assault memories, emotions and meanings, often quickly and without having to talk about them  
Rogers, S. & Silver, SM (2002). Is EMDR an exposure therapy? A review of trauma. protocols. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58, 43-59. [www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/RogersSilver2002.pdf](http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/RogersSilver2002.pdf)  
[www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com) - incl. "Find a Clinician" ([www.emdr.com/clinic.htm](http://www.emdr.com/clinic.htm))